DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 590 FL 022 167

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TITLE	Report of a TEFL Workshop in China.
INSTITUTION	Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong, Kowloon.
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	11p.; In: "Occasional Papers in English Language Teaching, 1993." p93-102.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Course Content; Course Evaluation; Course Organization; Educational Environment; Educational Objectives; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Inservice Teacher Education; Language Skills; *Language Teachers; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; Second Language Instruction; *Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	*China

ABSTRACT

The report details a 12-day workshop for 40 teachers of English as a foreign language (TEFL) held in China. It begins with an overview of the status of instruction in English as a second language (ESL) in that country, highlighting both progress and the difficulty of keeping up with demand for ESL teachers. Areas of difficulty in ESL instruction, as perceived by the teachers, are then outlined and workshop content is described. In the first week, a variety of teaching approaches were introduced, with lectures on theory in the morning and practical applications using both foreign and Chinese instructional materials demonstrated in the afternoon. In the second week, the theme was creation of a learning environment by integrating the four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and making lessons interesting. Course evaluation results are presented, with excerpts from participants' comments. Overall, the teachers found the workshop content useful and were motivated to make their instruction more communicative and lively. Followup activities, including incentives for classroom application of workshop content, were conducted. Recommendations for further action include development of additional instructional materials and the targeting of oral proficiency in teacher training. (MSE)

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ED 371 590

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REPORT OF A TEFL WORKSHOP IN CHINA

ABSTRACT

This is a report of a 12-day workshop for 40 TEFL teachers in Changzhou, near Nanjing. The report starts with a description of the current TEFL situation in China. It then lists the objectives of the workshop as required by the Changzhou Municipal Education Bureau. An account of how these objectives are realized in the workshop is then given followed by recommendations for more effective English language teaching in China.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) has received increasing attention in the past decade in China. Workshops and seminars on TEFL have been organized in big cities to prepare teachers to adopt more effective means of teaching. Professional journals like English Teaching and Research Notes are published and circulated nation-wide to promote new ideas. Yet, the most important change is brought about in the choice of TEFL textbooks. The use of the standard textbooks using the grammar-translation approach is fading out. In its place, there is a new textbook Junior English for China (jointly prepared by Longman Group UK Limited and People's Educational Press, China). It contains the best of the grammar-translation., situational and communicative tasks. This new book is being piloted in various schools.

That is the bright side of TEFL. There is, however, the not-so-bright side. Because of the mere size of China, there is always an inadequacy in the number of English teachers needed. Many of the proficient English teachers are lured away by the business sector. Not only is there a demand for quantity of English teachers, there is also a demand on the quality of English teachers. The quality of TEFL is not at all satisfactory as Table 1 illustrates. What is being emphasized by TEFL teachers does not seem to constitute good English teacher while what is being neglected seems to be essential to good language learning.[1]

Nevertheless, TEFL in China is moving forward because the authorities concerned are now beginning to improve the situation. As mentioned earlier, there are workshops and seminars for teachers in big cities. In addition, medium size cities are also striving to improve English instruction. An example is the Technical Assistance of the Education Component under the World Bank Loan Project of Changzhou. The Changzhou Municipal Education Bureau called for a 12-day workshop entitled "Teaching Methodology of English as a Foreign Language". The objectives they set forth are:

> comparison, demonstration, practice and guidance of current major teaching methods of various schools; imitation and activities of English-speaking situations so that participants could get experience that is similar to real situations; and ways to improve middle school students' English proficiency in medium-sized

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cities should be included.[1]

THE CHANGZHOU WORKSHOP

In the present paper, the Changzhou workshop is reported as a case study to show the different facets of TEFL in China. Findings are presented under thematic headings together with the course content.

Data collection for this report took place throughout the workshop. At the start, there was a survey on classroom situations for English teaching and areas of difficulty for TEFL teachers. During the workshop, there were informal interviews with teacher participants to discuss certain issues in depth. At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to evaluate the workshop.

To examine the efficiency of language teaching, apart from looking at the quality of teachers, we can look at the teaching load, the class size, the amount of exposure and the support materials. Questions on these elements were asked in the survey. Responses collected helped to give a better picture of the TEFL situation.

Unlike their counterparts in Hong Kong, teachers in China usually teach only one subject in the school curriculum. However, mainland teachers have other duties apart from teaching English. For instance, they have a class period every morning for newspaper reading, another one at the end of the day for homework coaching and one period per week for group preparation/meeting with other TEFL teachers. In addition, they have to prepare supplementary exercises and copy them on small blackboards for display (photocopying machines are rare commodities in Chinese schools). They also have to mark 60 exercise books and sometimes visit students' families. Thus, the TEFL teachers in China have a very heavy workload indeed.

The medium of instruction is Putonghua in China and students are exposed to English only during classtime. Hence, the amount of English input given by teachers is an essential variable contributing to acquisition of the target language.

As shown in Table 3, the majority of students are exposed to English for 1 to 3 hours per week in class. Outside class, English is seldom heard apart from a weekly programme on the state television and the BBC radio broadcast (if students have access to them). Students are not immersed in the target language, but rather they study it as a factual subject like Chemistry. This has created a number of problems for TEFL teachers (please see section on Areas of Difficulty). Whether they have the chance to speak the language would be another factor conducive to English acquisition. This does not seem to be the case as shown in Table 4.

According to teacher judgement, students have extremely limited chance for oral practice, only a few minutes a week. There were a few who claimed that their students speak English for 30 to 100 minutes per week. These teachers have included choral practice like reading a dialogue aloud as opportunities for English speaking.

With such an acquisition-poor environment, it is understandable that there are lots of difficulties for TEFL teachers. The major ones are listed below, with numbers in brackets showing how many teachers perceived those items as problems.

Areas of difficulty as perceived by teachers:

1. how to make English learning interesting (15)
2. how to teach grammar effectively (11)
3. how to improve listening and speaking ability (9)
4. how to provide incentive to use English when there is no language environment for English use (8)
5. how to help students remember new words (7)
6. how to improve reading and writing ability (5)
7. how to teach communicatively when entrance examination only focuses on grammar (5)
8. how to squeeze time to help students practise English (4)
9. how to handle a class of 60 students (4)
10. how to deal with students who simply don't want to learn English (3)
11. how to convince students to learn English when it is of no use after graduation (3)
12. how to help students pass the examinations. (2)

With all these constraints, one would not expect students to have high motivation to learn English. Nevertheless, for the minority, mostly students of key schools, the reasons motivating them to learn English are:

1. to enter a good senior school (there is an examination at the end of junior three which places students in senior secondary schools)
2. to get a better job
3. to satisfy parents and teachers

With heavy workload, inadequate materials and support, limited classtime and generally low motivation, teachers come to the workshop looking for solutions to their problems. Their expectations of the Workshop can be summarised as:

1. to learn new methods in teaching English
2. to listen to English
3. to learn how to improve students' oral English
4. to make the lessons more active and more interesting

Course Content

The workshop started with a brief opening ceremony. A needs analysis then followed, yielding most of the data described above. The workshop was conducted for 12 days with 6 contact hours a day (for content headings, please see Appendix I).

The main theme in the first week was the introduction of different language teaching approaches, with lectures on theories in the morning and practical applications in the afternoon. Language learning theories related to the Grammar-translation, Situational, Audio-lingual and Communicative methods were explained to the participants with plenty of examples. In the afternoon, the consultants demonstrated how a lesson could be handled using a certain method. Materials used outside China were used first. Then a lesson from the English textbook used in China was adopted to show how different methods could be used to deal with the same topic. The participating teachers took the role of students

during demonstrations. Then they discussed the lesson presented in small groups.

In the second week, the main theme was the creation of an English learning environment through integrating the four skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking. As the four skills are described separately in the new 9-year Universal Education Syllabus of China, each skill was given one whole day and dealt with in depth. Teaching methods to meet the requirements as listed in the Syllabus were again demonstrated by the consultants. In addition, activities to make English learning interesting were also introduced. Teacher participants gained first-hand experience by joining those activities. Towards the end of the workshop, some participants were invited to show how they could adapt their lessons. There was also a competition in producing display board materials.

Evaluation of the Programme by Participants

According to Changzhou's requirement, time was alloted for participants to evaluate the usefulness of the workshops. They were asked four open-ended questions and most of them had given concise and specific answers. As illustration, the answer that represents the view of most the respondents is given under each question.

1. To what extent do you feel the objectives of the workshops have been met?

"I feel that most of the objectives have been met in this workshop. The demonstration of the three major methods in teaching English gives a clear, vivid picture of comparison. A lot has been done to create an English speaking environment."

In sum, the majority of participants felt that the objectives had been met and they were especially happy with the practical lessons.

2. Please name the most useful and the most boring sessions.

None of the participants considered any of the sessions boring. But with the selection of the most useful session, different teachers had different views. The results are as follows:

Communicative and Situational methods	16
Demonstration by consultation using a lesson from the current English book used in China	8
Creating an English learning environment	6
Comparison of teaching methods	4
The teaching of writing, reading and listening	4
Practice in English teaching and guidance from consultant	4

The teachers liked to be shown methods that can be used in their own classrooms. Thus, nearly half of the participants stated that they liked the communicative and situational methods. They liked them more when the consultants demonstrated how to put in some elements of interest when teaching a lesson in their textbook.

3. What have you learned from these workshops? Give specific descriptions.

Participants listed nearly all the activities done in the workshops especially those they found most useful (as shown in Question 2).

4. How will your teaching be affected as a result of these

workshops?

For this question, teachers pledged that they would teach in a more communicative manner. Some of the answers are:

"My traditional teaching method will be modernized to follow the teaching trend abroad."

"I think I can teach my students better by using the ways I have learned in these workshops, especially in teaching reading, writing and speaking. And I can help my students speak, think in English in class later on."

"I am encouraged to create an English-learning environment in class and provide extra-curricular activities."

"I will put the theory into practice, and in my later teaching, I will use some of the teaching approaches such as situational approach and communicative approach to make my class more interesting and more lively."

To summarise, the majority of teachers said that they would try to make their English lessons more lively.

Follow-up Activities

True to their words, the mainland teachers did follow up with what they got in the workshop. One of the teacher organizers wrote to say how that sharing was done:

"Before the new school year started on Sept. 1, we English teachers had a regular meeting, at which decisions were made that demonstration lessons by the participants would be given in Sept. and Oct., and teachers of relevant grades would come and observe them. It is the extension of the workshop. We hope the theories and methods they learned at the workshop will be applied into their daily work."

The Changzhou Municipal Education Bureau also organized a "Basic Teaching Theory and Practice Competition" in which teachers were asked to write out lesson plans, to answer questions on TEFL theories and to do micro-teaching. The winners were promoted to Senior Teachers. That proved to be a good incentive for the English teachers.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the teacher participants were very happy with the 12-day workshop. They felt that the consultants had shown them (1) how to make English teaching more interesting, e.g. by doing jigsaw reading, by singing songs; (2) how to handle 60 students in a class more effectively e.g. by integrating the four skills in task-based activities; and (3) how to provide more chances for practice, e.g. by providing information cards for group work. To a certain extent, some of the difficulties they mentioned at the start of the workshop have been dealt with satisfactorily.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers of English in China have very little teaching materials in English. Indeed almost nothing authentic is there, so it is extremely difficult for them to prepare lessons. One way to improve English teaching is to provide teachers with resources in the form of different textbooks of relevant levels, graded readers and other authentic materials. That is to say, even though the newly piloted Junior English for China is a much better textbook than the existing one, TEFL teachers should be given copies of English language textbooks from outside China for reference. Also, there should be a collection of graded readers in

every secondary school so that students can do some extensive reading to increase their exposure.

Teachers in the workshop claimed that they use quite a bit of English in class, but they are a special group in that they either volunteered or were nominated to join the programme. It is understood that the oral proficiency of many teachers other than this select group is far from fluent. This would hamper the teaching of English using the Situational or Communicative methods since such methods require teachers with a certain degree of fluency. In order to improve TEFL, more training must be given to teachers to help them improve their oral proficiency. This can be done by having teacher trainees undergo some English enhancement programmes such as the workshop described in this report.

NOTES

[1] Professor J. Zhang of the East China Normal University has very neatly summed up the weaknesses of TEFL in his talk to teachers in the present workshop (5 Aug. 1992).

[2] Documents of the Technical Assistance of the Education Component under the World Bank Loan Project of Changzhou, Luoyang and Shashi. February 2, 1992. Page 38.

Appendix I

Contents of the 12-day TEFL Workshop

The workshop was held from Monday to Saturday for two weeks. The morning session started at 8:30 a.m. and finished at 11:30 a.m. The afternoon session started at 3 p.m. and finished at 6 p.m. There was a break of 15 minutes in the middle of both sessions. What was done during the 24 sessions is as follows:

3 Aug. Monday

A.M. * Introduction to the series of workshop with a brief description of each session.

* A Needs Analysis Survey

* A brief account of English language teaching in Hong Kong

P.M. * Role play showing the Grammar-translation, Situational, Audio-lingual and Communicative methods using the same theme "Ocean Park"

4 Aug. Tuesday

A.M. * An introduction to different language teaching approaches in the Western world

P.M. * Language learning theory related to the Situational method

* Demonstration of and practice in the Situational method

5 Aug. Wednesday

A.M. * Language learning theory related to the Audio-lingual method

P.M. * Demonstration of and practice in the Audio-lingual method

6 Aug. Thursday

A.M. * Language learning theory related to the Communicative method

P.M. * Demonstration of and practice in the Communicative method

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7 Aug. Friday

A.M. * Objectives of foreign language teaching in China

P.M. * Cultural factors in English language teaching

8 Aug. Saturday

A.M. * Error analysis

P.M. * Research in English language teaching methodology

10 Aug. Monday

A.M. * The teaching of reading : theory and practice

P.M. * Workshop on the teaching of reading

11 Aug. Tuesday

A.M. * The teaching of writing : theory and practice

P.M. * Workshop on the teaching of writing

12 Aug. Wednesday

A.M. * The teaching of listening and speaking : theory and practice

P.M. * Workshop on the teaching of listening and speaking

13 Aug. Thursday

A.M. * Creating an English learning environment

P.M. * Language games

14 Aug. Friday

A.M. * Experimental teaching

P.M. * Preparing teaching materials

15 Aug. Saturday

A.M. * Extensive reading programmes

P.M. * Review of teaching methods

* Question and answer session

* Evaluation of the present 12-day programme

Appendix II

Table 1 TEFL Classroom Practice

Emphasizing	Neglecting
1. knowledge of English	English language use
2. explanation	performance
3. rote learning	comprehension
4. written work	oral work
5. text	situation
6. uniformity	individuality
7. reading in chorus	group work
8. minority	majority
9. criticism	praise
10. grades for promotion	quality for life
11. receptive skills	productive skills

Table 2 Teaching Load of Participants (N=40)

Teachers	Classes of English	periods/class/week
14	2	6
1	1	6
2	3	6
16	2	5
3	7--9	2--6

Table 3 Amount of Class-time Teachers use English

class time	number of teachers
0% -- 25%	3
26% -- 50%	14
51% -- 75%	10
76% -- 100%	7

Table 4 Amount of Time Students Speak English Each Week

1 -- 5	minutes	per	students	stated	by	12	teachers
10	..	..	..	..		8	..
15 -- 25	..	..	..	..		7	..
30 -- 50	..	..	..	..		3	..
60 --100	..	..	..	..		4	..